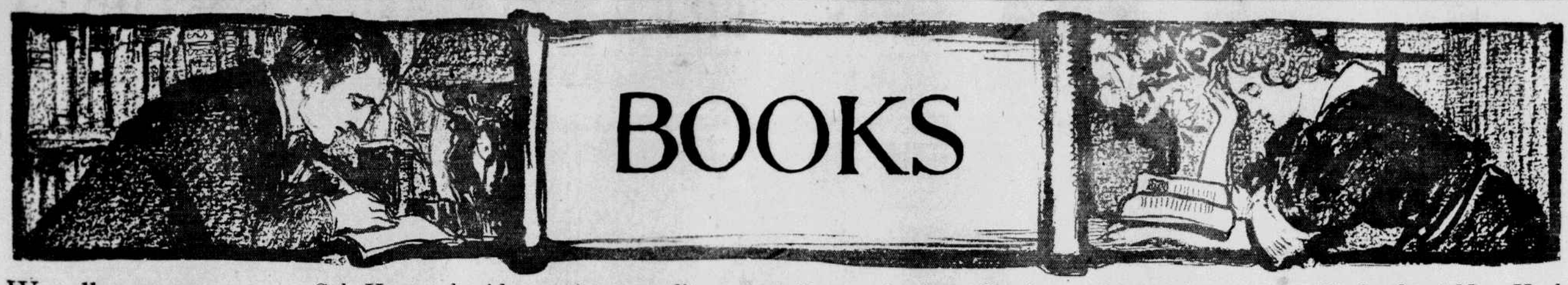

Woodberry prose informal essays

LITERARY MEMOIRS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. By George Edward Woodberry. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH HOUGHTON.

Of this fifth volume in the series of essays on life and letters by George Edward Woodberry, poet-critic, even the title "Literary Memoirs of the Nineteenth Century" is more informal, more intimate than the others. Here Mr. Woodberry's approach is most often through the correspondence of one author with another, or by means of glimpses into a great man's diary. Earlier years, notably those of Ruskin, and little known incidents of famous lives are uncovered. With a profundity of scholarship rare in our time, and above all an eagerness for truth born of his affection for the masters, he delights in smashing, by actual quotation and fresh interpretation, popular notions of literary men. "The last thing we need be anxious about is property" reads one of the quotations—for Lowell indeed a new note. And always Mr. Woodberry succeeds in avoiding the outworn word, the abstract term of criticism.

The effect of the book is not that of being escorted, ceremoniously, up high marble steps into the castles of the great, but quietly of entering through the little postern door, led by one who has lived all his life within, as a familiar of the house. Matthew Arnold says: "It is the business of the critical power in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is." It is "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." Both these things Mr. Woodberry in the highest sense achieves; and by the very approachableness of his rich criticism he becomes spokesman to an astonishingly wide circle. In a sense he does for literature what Mr. Wells attempts in history, making it available for those whose outlook and grasp are far less than his own.

The lions of yesterday, Darwin, Carlyle and Ruskin, become as approachable as modern science has made the dinosaurs and trachodons of the Mesozoic period, at once familiar and noble. Human situations in the lives of the poets are touched or developed in a way that can only the more endear them to us. The Wordsworths, it seems, were at one time totally unappreciated as neighbors. At Stowey where, to be near Coleridge, they had rented a house for a year, they were misjudged and hated "because of the profound seclusion in which they lived, the incomprehensible nature of their occupations, their strange way of frequenting out of the way and untrodden spots." Finally the neighbor complex came to a head with the sending by the lady who owned the estates of a Government spy to watch their actions, and Thomas Poole, farmer friend of both the poets, was obliged to give a certificate of character. [See essay on "Thomas Poole and His Friends," page 45.]

Again, in dealing with the strange family life of the De Quinceys, Woodberry humanly interprets the causes, now of Richard De Quincey's running away to sea, now of his brother's addiction to the drug opium. "Mrs. De Quincey," he says, "was a woman of much formal propriety, attached to the Clapham sect in religious and moral sympathy—she was self-distrustful and sought advice from her friends the Clapham people so that the children felt this interference of strangers as a bar between them and their mother." The problems of Shelley, too, his liberal provision for his first wife, his wisdom in refusing further to be victimized by William Godwin, father of Mary Wollestonecraft Godwin, his second wife, are sympathetically told. The august friendship of Carlyle and Emerson becomes, in the essay "Carlyle and His Friends," full of heart, the natural association of two lonely men. Taken out of its distorted setting in Froude's biography and the temperamental autobiography, this historic relation is set forth in original documents, by means of Prof. Norton's collection of letters. Woodberry presents a new and kindly Carlyle. Assuming that interest no longer is confined to the question of whether the dyspeptic philosopher did or did not beat his wife, Woodberry is able to find another side.

We are reminded that Carlyle had the habit of reading aloud from Homer to an infirm acquaintance, that he did much for youths struggling to make a living in the City, that whenever he writes to his aged mother "the page is brighter for the beauty and tenderness of the relation" (p. 184). In the magnificent summary of this essay Mr. Woodberry's reason for praising the Norton selection of letters is significant: "It lowers the relief of hardness and shows more fully the kindliness, fidelity and true-heartedness of Carlyle, in which his manhood lay quite as much as in his self-rallying courage, his indignation at feebleness and folly and his uncharitableness when his affections were not concerned."

This keen sense of value is nowhere more strongly felt than in the judgment of Longfellow: "Had he been in closer contact with the poetic motives in life itself he might have been touched with passion; but as he felt them at second hand, as it were, he could not lift his mood higher than the region of sentiment. He was a poet developed by books and not by experience; even when he draws from life itself, his cunning is bookish." Or this on Coleridge: "It is plain to any one who reads the topics of Coleridge's discourses that his mind ranged through a vast circuit of knowledge habitually, but that it touched the facts only at single points and superficially; in other words, he displays compass rather than grasp." The nice distinction is further carried out: "Persons found in Coleridge's mind the rare and curious coexistence of fixed dogma with incessant speculation; he afforded the sense of untrammelled investigation without once disturbing the certainty of the prejudged cause." In the essay on Darwin's life Mr. Woodberry, as classical scholar, freely admits that Darwin seems not only to have completely succeeded without Greek influences, but also to have lost nothing by his failure to assimilate them. His words on the lovableness of Darwin's personality and the moral beauty of his character are memorable. Magnanimously, enthusiastically, he says: "This was a character which might well spare the humanities," but not without reverting at the end, sadly, to the lack of the religious element in his life.

Besides sentences of rich interpretative content it is easy to find delicious bits in metaphor and phrasing, treasures of style typical of this dean of American letters. "The official biography of Longfellow is characterized by its good manners." Or, in speaking of the landscape gardening projects of George Beaumont: "It is interesting to observe how he obtains suggestions from the poets and makes their Pegasus plough his field." Smooth bound from paragraph to paragraph, unchecked by frost of awkwardness, his thought luxuriantly flowers. Along the way are strewn bits of information, such as that John Motley was a Lincoln scholar or that Ruskin once fancied himself great in the science of geology and, indeed, in figure outline engraving too; or an enchanting description of Thackeray "as a colossal infant—smooth, white, shiny, ringlety hair, a roundish face, with a little dab of a nose upon which it is a perpetual wonder how he keeps his spectacles; a sweet, but rather piping voice, with something of a childish treble about it and a very tall, slightly stooping figure." (p. 230.) Ability to quote, in a few selections, enough to give the feeling of an author, fills the last need of a critical equipment, which in Mr. Woodbury reaches its high mark in American letters. An overwhelming power of analysis and induction joined to beauty and sincerity of expression opens to him his rightful station in that strong group of which Emerson, Lowell, Howells are bright, particular stars. And here in the "Literary Memoirs of the Nineteenth Century" are classics which we all can understand and love.

Col. House, besides acting as editor, contributes the introduction and one chapter to a volume of explanations of the Peace Congress by Hoover, Gompers and others

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT PARIS By American Delegates, edited by Col. Edward Mandell House and Charles Seymour, Professor of History at Yale University. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Reviewed by WADE CHANCE.

The reader who is looking for entertainment may not be wholly disappointed even in so earnest a volume as this. No doubt that is partly because the chapters were prepared first to be given as popular talks. Prof. Clive Day reports this incident: When the Saar Valley plan was concluded, Lloyd George said to Wilson: "Mr. President, I think we have got a very good plan here."

Mr. Wilson replied: "Well, why don't you apply it to Ireland?"

This book, by eighteen authors, comprises by far the most important contribution to the literature of the great events at Paris yet made, especially since it may be regarded as the final presentation of the part played there by Mr. Wilson, written as it is by his advisers and immediate assistants, including Messrs. Hoover, Lamont and Gompers. It throws great light on the subject, even though some of the illumination must be sought for between the lines. Judging from the respective chapters written by the ten professors and three legal advisers who accompanied Mr. Wilson to Paris, their minds seem to have gone along with his with marvellous unanimity, for there are few admissions of disagreement or suggestions of fallibility on his part, although we get occasional hints that some things happened at Paris which we do not hear about. It would sometimes appear that a correct knowledge of history in the making is permitted only to posterity and denied to the contemporaneous generation. Only when personal dignity and justice are called in question, as in Mr. Lansing's case, is the complete narrative forthcoming.

On President Wilson's instructions Col. House and Dr. Sidney Edward Mezes formed "The Inquiry" as early as September, 1917. On the report of this body, January 2, 1918, the Fourteen Points were based. Its members later joined Mr. Wilson's Mission to Paris, and plainly took more part in assisting him than did his fellow delegates, save Col. House. Curiously enough, we do not find Mr. Henry White's name in the book. But Prof. Clive Day pays this tribute to Mr. Lansing, with unexpected frankness:

"No one could surpass Mr. Lansing in the logic and force with which he could present a legal argument. But even first class ability did not count when it was in the second place in the delegation. Lansing might convince every one in the room, but if he did not convince Mr. Wilson his argument profited nothing."

Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary surrendered so precipitately that there was no time to insert the Fourteen Points, but Dr. Mezes relates that when Germany's turn came President Wilson would not undertake the task of making peace until he was assured that the German Government accepted them.

In Col. House's chapter, "The Versailles Peace in Retrospect," we find little definite opinion of Mr. Wilson, for he walks very gingerly; but we may infer much, especially when he says:

"Probably the greatest misfortune of the conference was that it assembled too late and took too long for preliminaries. Had it convened immediately after the armistice and *had it dealt promptly with Germany* the long uncertainty, disorder and confusion might in part have been avoided." House knew well it was Wilson's insistence on intertwining the league with the treaty which caused the main delay, as Lansing declares in his book.

Col. House condemns secrecy at Paris, adding: "The failure to carry through 'open covenants openly arrived at' left us in the attitude of reformers working in the dark. . . . One of the mistakes at Paris was lack of publicity." Again he knew Wilson was responsible. Tardieu says in his book (and House has said "Tardieu knows"): "As early as January, 1919, President Wilson asked that the French censorship should be exercised not only over the French newspapers but over despatches sent to foreign papers." And he might have added, over despatches received in Paris from America.

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Col. House

Col. House apparently regrets a peace with victory, even while he admits the necessities of the situation. "Theoretically," he says, "'peace without victory' was within the realm of reason, but practically it was not. Civilization must advance further before such a peace is possible."

He condemns the Senate for rejecting the treaty, "the only instrument which has been devised to save us from the destruction of another world war," and says "it is a melancholy reflection upon our right to exist." While he recognizes the Senators' right to safeguard American interests, he says: "It is to be regretted that they did not choose another occasion to battle with the Executive for what they declared to be their rights." Likewise Mr. Wilson might have taken any other occasion to infringe upon the constitutional prerogatives of the Senate less important than a challenge of American sovereignty.

He advocates the limitation of armament but does not disclose why he did not seek to influence his chief when Mr. Daniels announced his huge building programme on the very eve of the Peace Conference.

Although it was Col. House's original intent to give us the true story of how peace was made and the armistice granted at Versailles, he omits it; but he is quoted in Dr. Mezes's chapter all too briefly on this vital subject. We find here the most extraordinary statement in the book. Its motive doubtless was a feeling that some explanation was due to meet the conviction, now well nigh general, that peace was made prematurely. House says:

"The outstanding problem was to have terms cover what must be unconditional surrender without imperilling peace itself. The military spirit in the United States was at its height and the feeling could not be ignored. (Who does not remember that even Mr. Daniels wanted to march down Unter den Linden and dictate terms at Berlin?) With the Entente the situation was different. They were war-worn and war-weary, bled white. Germany was retreating in orderly fashion . . . she might be able to hold out for months. If she had done this, and we had failed to make peace . . . there would have been a political revolution in every allied country save the United States. The people would almost of certainty have overthrown the existing governments and placed in power ministers instructed to reopen negotiations on the basis of the Fourteen Points and with more moderate conditions."

As against this remarkable statement, I will quote Clemenceau's own words. He said to me on March 20, 1919: "The armistice was made a month too soon, but it was not France's fault." Haig, in his official report, states that on the morning of the armistice his cavalry penetrated fifteen to twenty miles with.n the enemy lines and in a few hours their retreat would have been a rout.

Col. House has still much to tell which a waiting world would welcome.

Mr. Hoover on "The Economic Administration During the Armistice" adds little that is new. He faced the problem of saving 160,000,000 of liberated and enemy peoples "threatened with the most terrible famine since the Thirty Years' War, when a third of the population concerned died." America alone fed over 7,500,000 children of twenty nations. At one time 75,000,000 people were being supported by charity; 35,000,000 tons of commodities were obtained and settled for. It is likely that history will regard Mr. Hoover's work as the greatest single handed achievement of the war, excepting only those of Joffre and Foch.

In Mr. Lamont's admirably written chapter on "Reparations," it is held that Clemenceau and Lloyd George were mistaken in thinking their constituents would have turned them out of office if the amount had been definitely fixed, whatever the sum. Clemenceau especially, he thinks, would have withstood any storm. He pictures him in these words:

"A great rugged bowlder . . . a rock with all the forces of dismay and despair breaking impotently against his rugged flanks . . . By sheer will and dogged determination he stopped the running tide . . . He became a mighty fortress, around which the hosts of France rallied and became valiant."

Mr. Lamont credits Wilson with being most considerate of the opinions of his coadjutors, but adds:

"Mr. Wilson did not have a well organized secretarial staff. He did far too much work himself. . . . He was the hardest worked man at the conference—it was his inability, not his refusal, to use men, to know how to delegate work on a large scale."

Mr. Lamont then makes this strong statement:

"We all felt that the failure of the United States to have representation on the commission was due to not having ratified the treaty. . . . This omission has, in my opinion, been in considerable measure responsible for the lamentable delay in fixing the indemnity . . . and has been largely responsible for the continued economic unsettlement of Europe."

This grave assertion takes no account of what was undoubtedly an alternative course possible for Mr. Wilson—continuing Mr. Polk or some other personal representative in Europe to confer with the Supreme Council, which alone has been dealing with Germany over reparations. He needed no authority through the treaty, since he had already assumed equal authority and greater.

Mr. Lamont is emphatic in declaring that from start to finish Mr. Wilson and his advisers opposed vigorously any cancellation of the Allied debt to America.

Mr. Mezes informs us that David Hunter Miller and Major James Brown Scott were the mission's "two experts on international law," and without questioning the wisdom of such appointments, since they occupied posts which might have been filled by Taft and Root in a mission differently constituted, their testimony is important. Rather curiously, Miller thinks *our duty to Germany* demanded a League of Nations, saying, "It was the right of Germany to insist on the establishment of a league for her own protection, carrying out a part of the bargain with Germany—she would justly have regarded its absence . . . as a gross breach of faith." A new view, this! Mr. Miller makes, however, an important admission, in these words:

"So far as the Lodge reservations made changes in the league, they were wholly of a minor character, they left the structure intact and they would have interfered with its workings not at all."

He also denies that the treaty was delayed by the work of formulating the League of Nations, since Mr. Wilson and his committee sat up o' nights working on the covenant. Had they instead employed their evenings on the treaty it would obviously have been ready much earlier.

Mr. Miller describes a scene, after midnight, when in discussing the French claims, Mr. Wilson won over his objectors "by a speech of witching eloquence which left the secretaries gasping with admiration, their pencils in their hands, their duties forgotten, and hardly a word taken down."

Alas that the bewitched stenographers failed to preserve such a masterpiece!

Prof. Douglas Wilson Johnson gives an extremely able résumé of the Fiume question, but omits entirely the sensational episode of Mr. Wilson's appeal to the Italian people over the heads of their delegates, who were later sustained by an overwhelming vote. And surely this is a convincing example of the futility of America's interference in Europe, when after many months of disruption which created deep enmities and prevented Italy from getting credits, supplies and food the question was settled as it should have been in the beginning, by mutual agreement between Italy and Czecho-Slovakia—and not on Wilson lines but closely approximating those originally claimed by Orlando. Marconi told the writer that Mr. Wilson had influenced bankers against making a large loan to Italy, which had practically been agreed upon, negotiated in Paris by Marconi and Schanzer, Italian Minister of Finance. We find confirmation in Nitti's speech in Rome, July 27, 1919:

"American credits fall due on the 31st of August, and the American Treasury has no obligation of prepayment. I must add, and it is as well that the country should know this, that the United States Government considers that private credits cannot be granted to Italy until the political situation has been cleared up."

Prof. Bowman in his chapter on Constantinople and the Balkans relates that after Mr. Wilson left Paris he was commissioned by Mr. Polk to ascertain Clemenceau's views on Fiume. Tardieu brought Clemenceau's answer: "The Americans are charming, but they are far away; when you have gone the Italians remain—and as our neighbors."

Bowman says: "There was a time when the conference might have been broken up. Mr. Wilson called three of us one day to his house. He said: 'Gentlemen, I am in trouble. . . . The French want the left bank of the Rhine. I told M. Clemenceau I could not consent. He became very much excited and demanded the ownership of the saar basin. I could not agree; it would mean giving 300,000 Germans to France. I do not know if I shall see Clemenceau again, or if he will return to the conference this afternoon. I do not know if the Peace Conference will continue. I want you to assist me in working out the principles we are standing for, and do justice to France.'"

Bowman then adds: "A solution was found, one that stands in the treaty to-day."

But he fails to tell us that Clemenceau made concessions on both these points, and agreed to temporary occupation of the Rhine only on Mr. Wilson's undertaking to protect France through the Anglo-French-American treaty, promising aid to France in case of German invasion. This Mr. Wilson never pressed on the Senate, and never advised them of the facts until they made inquiry. Certainly 300,000 Germans deserve consideration, but Mr. Wilson did not evidence the same concern for forty million Chinese of Shantung, placing them under Japan on an unwritten undertaking of future release—so that Japan might not withdraw from the conference and endanger the treaty and the league.

Baron de Rothschild told the writer in Paris in March, 1919: "Mr. Wilson was welcomed because America saved France, but he played the schoolmaster. We want Germany to pay 10,000,000,000 francs annually. She can do it. Wilson joins Lloyd George in opposing Poland's claim to Danzig. We thought he would be satisfied to have had his fourteen points accepted."

Admiral Mayo writes on "The Atlantic Fleet in the Great War"—and perhaps unintentionally bears witness to the entire lack of preparedness preceding America's entry.

Gen. Tasker Bliss discusses "The Problem of Disarmament," but says nothing about Paris, nor of his proposal submitted at the time of the armistice that Germany be completely disarmed then and there—a proposal that was not followed.

While a number of chapters denote an especially able grasp of the respective subjects, there was a notable absence from the mission of any man possessing a general understanding of European policies who could properly fit together the shattered pieces of the vast picture puzzle, except Hoover in his special field. It was Mr Wilson who undertook this gigantic task alone, combating European experts who had lived intimately with these varied interwoven problems for a lifetime. He intervened in every petty boundary dispute, not America's concern, and he alone participated in epoch making discussions which thus became his exclusive experience.

America, which sent two million men to fight, sent but one man to make peace. When we saw all that was able and distinguished in British statesmanship assembled at the Guildhall in London to greet the one single American the discrepancy was all too evident.

To make a final estimate of the concert of Europe: Mr. Wilson apparently preferred to dazzle his audience in the manner of an ambitious virtuoso who insisted on performing Beethoven's "Eroica" symphony as a piano transcription rather than achieve complete harmony by conducting the grand orchestra of American statesmanship which was at his disposal.

Books are for us all

APPRECIATION OF LITERATURE. By George Edward Woodberry. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

Reviewed by DAVID COYLE.

"It is useful to recognize at once the fact that literature is not an object of study, but a mode of pleasure; it is not a thing to be known merely like science, but to be lived. If a book does not yield immediate pleasure to the reader, as direct and intimate as sensation or emotion, it fails with that particular person to discharge the proper function of literature. . . . That reader does best who in his use of literature insists on the presence of this immediate appeal to himself in the books he reads. If the book does not have this effect with him, if it does not cooperate with his own taste and interest, it may be the best of books for others, but it is not for him—at least it is not yet for him.

"It is by sympathy and imagination that one enters into the lives and fortunes of others; and these two faculties have richness, strength and scope in proportion to the depth and range of one's own life. Sympathy and imagination are the faculties which literature most cultivates by exercise, and the enlightenment which literature brings is in the main achieved through them. Appreciation of literature is neither rapid nor final; it moves with no swifter step than life itself, and it opens, like life, always on larger horizons and other labors."

What a joy it is, among technical standards and artificial criticism, to listen to this comforting doctrine! Life is a complicated affair itself, and its drudgery is only compensated by the adventure of it—and here we are assured that literature is no more, for us, than life itself. Every one who is exposed to cultivated society is in constant danger of assuming the imaginary obligation to do his duty by literature. Blessings on the prophet who comes to remind us that one's duty to literature is like one's duty toward a trout stream in the month of May: If one must wade, it is only to attain some desired vantage point from which to cast into a new pool. And if one most study technique, it is only so far as irresistible desire leads him on.

For the appreciation of poetry, for instance, Dr. Woodberry says: "A scientific and technical knowledge is by no means required of the reader, but an elementary acquaintance with melody and structure, such as to allow of correct reading and the perception of the harmonious confinement of thought within the limits of the musical beats of phrase and line, is hardly to be dispensed with. It is questionable, on the other hand, whether much is gained by the study of the artistic field in larger matters, such as, for example, dramatic construction. In that direction the reader turns his attention from the work to the workmanship, and may embarrass himself with theory or with preconceptions not universally applicable. In general all study of literature, in the way of preparation to grasp and understand, whether it be linguistic, historical or æsthetic, exists to be forgotten and laid off as soon as completed, leaving the reader alone with the spirit of the book, which then speaks to him face to face."

According to his own doctrine, of course, Woodberry does not expect to be read by the people whose literary appreciations are bounded by *Vanity Fair* on the north and Scott Fitzgerald on the southeast. But upon those whose conscience pricks them when they notice the uncut pages of some mute, inglorious volume of Milton or Wordsworth his words will fall like healing balm. Literature was made for man, not man for literature. To read only what one had "ruther" need not mean to live forever in cheap fiction. There is sure to be in the mass of "great" literature some part which by its style and subject is possible for the most limited reader to enjoy. Children can find their own part in the Greek myths, the Bible and even Shakespeare, for these are based on universal experience, which is partly common to everybody.

Such illuminating criticism as one finds in the genial pages of Woodberry is, for those who are ready to like it, a real part of the joy of literature itself.

Birds about New York

By ROBERT CARY.

Many the wild birds I of late have heard
Far on the city's outskirts wide and green,
And many a living color have I seen
Ere sang the thrush, brown hermit, undeterred;
The catbird, curious mime, hath all but purred;
The pewee, constant to her sorrows keen,
Complains; of suns that warm the skies serene
The oriole tells, and wrens with joy are stirred.
Sweet is the music of earth's poetry.
Listen, ye worldlings, to the meadow lark,
And to the grosbeak whistling merrily,
And to the goldfinch in the woodland park.
Would ye *hear* the burden of the mystery?
Then to melodious throats I bid ye hark!

Alan Seeger's tree

THE Writers Club will plant a memorial tree to-morrow in Washington Square Park in honor of the late Alan Seeger, the young American poet, who was killed in action while serving with the Foreign Legion during the world war.

This event will be one of particular interest, since Seeger was the first American man of letters to make the supreme sacrifice in the great war, and it is believed that this is the first time that a tree has ever been formally planted in America as a memorial to a poet, although this is a custom which is frequently carried out in Europe.

Alan Seeger was born in New York city on June 22, 1888. Immediately after the war broke out he enlisted in the French Foreign Legion.

The poet, who could fight as well as write, took part in many of the bloody battles along the Aisne front. It was during a charge his battalion made at Belloy-en-Santerre on July 4, 1916, during the battle of the Somme, exactly nine months before America joined the Allies, that Alan Seeger fell mortally wounded. His comrades said that the soldier-poet displayed supreme valor in action.

Alan Seeger was the author of "Poems," published in 1916, and "Letters and Diary" in 1917. His best known poems are "I Have a Rendezvous With Death," "Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers Fallen for France," "Champagne," and a number of exceptionally beautiful sonnets. His poems have been translated into French by Jean Richepin of the French Academy.

In New York Alan Seeger lived for a time at 61 Washington square, where he wrote several of his poems, and it is on the green lawn opposite this house—the plot of ground which he had surveyed many a time from the window of his studio—that the memorial tree will be planted.

Francis D. Gallatin, Commissioner of Parks, will speak at the planting. Several poets will speak and read selections from Alan Seeger's work.

According to a statement published in the *Figaro* of Paris last year, France has decided to erect a statue in memory of Alan Seeger.